



BROTHER ABDON, F.S.C.
(John Christenson)

Born: December 2, 1917 in Detroit, Michigan

Died: August 17, 1977 in Santa Fe, New Mexico

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John Christenson entered the Juniorate of Las Vegas, New Mexico in 1933 and took the habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at De La Salle Novitiate, Lafayette, Louisiana on August 14, 1936, taking the name of "Brother Andrew Abdon". He made final profession of vows on June 6, 1945.

He taught at St. Michael's High School in Santa Fe from 1944 to 1947 when he was transferred to Monterrey, Mexico where he remained until 1950. After a brief stay in New Iberia, he was again assigned to St. Michael's High School until 1971 when he was sent to Cathedral High School of El Paso; he served there as principal until 1973 when he returned a third time to his "beloved" St. Michael's High of Santa Fe where he died of a heart attack on August 17, 1977.

The funeral Mass took place in St. Francis Cathedral of Santa Fe with seven priests concelebrating. Interment was in the Brothers' plot in Rosario Cemetery of Santa Fe.

At his death Brother Abdon had no living surviving relatives.

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NOTES AND TESTIMONIALS ON BROTHER ABDON, F.S.C. (John Christenson)

TOUR OF DUTY

- 1937 - Lafayette, Louisiana (Holy Family Community)
- 1939 - Las Vegas, New Mexico (Holy Family Community)
- 1941 - Scholasticate (Las Vegas, New Mexico)
- 1944 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High School)
- 1947 - Monterrey, Mexico (Instituto Regiomontano)
- 1950 - New Iberia, Louisiana (St. Peter's) until August
- 1950 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High School)
- 1971 - El Paso, Texas (Cathedral High School)
- 1973 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High School)
- 1977 - Died August 17 at 4:15 P.M. at St. Michael's High School of Santa Fe, New Mexico

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Certificate of Baptism certifies that JOHN CHRISTENSEN, son of Sophus Christensen and Christina Sheehan, was born on the second of December 1917 and baptized on the fifth day of May, 1923 according to the rite of the Roman Catholic Church in St. Francis Chapel at Detroit, Michigan by the Rev. Daniel P. O'Donnell. Sponsors are listed as Henry Smith and Emma Antayou.

Certificate of Confirmation and First Communion certifies that JOHN GEORGE CHRISTENSEN received his First Holy Communion on the 31st of May, 1925 and that he was confirmed by the Right Reverend Michael J. Gallagher, Bishop of the Diocese of Detroit, on the 24th day of November, 1925 in St. Francis Chapel at Detroit, Michigan.

All future records spell his name CHRISTENSON.

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HOMILY DELIVERED BY BROTHER PAUL WALSH, FSC, PROVINCIAL

Friends, in the name of all the Brothers of the New Orleans-Santa Fe District, I would like to express my gratitude for your presence here this afternoon, and for your presence and prayers last night as we all prayed the rosary--Brother Abdon's favorite devotion to Our Lady.

As we pay our last respects to a man; a Brother, we knew and loved, we thank the members of the clergy of the archdiocese who have come to join us today, the Brothers who are here from Colorado, Texas, Louisiana as well as Santa Fe, the students of St. Michael's High School--Brother Abdon's and others--and all the parents and friends. Your presence, prayers and sympathy are well appreciated.

We cannot escape the reason why we are here, and that is, that Brother Abdon has died; this, despite our earnest wishes and efforts that it be not so, despite the fact that I found him very happy and in good spirits just five days ago in New Orleans. On that occasion we were attending the final profession as Christian Brothers of two young men intimately connected with St. Michael's. The ceremony was held in a church named in honor of a Christian Brother who has been declared a Saint of the Church--St. Benilde. On that occasion, Brother Robert Todd, one of your teachers of Religion and Art, and Brother Michael Cimino, a graduate of St. Michael's--in fact the first St. Michael's graduate to make final profession as a Christian Brother in fifteen years--promised to live as Christian Brothers for life.

Brother Abdon was quite taken by the crucifix which was presented to the newly professed at the ceremony and I promised to bring him one when I would make the annual visit to St. Michael's in the fall.

There will be no need for that, of course; Brother Abdon has no need of symbols anymore; he has confronted his Lord and Savior face to face; he has exchanged his own cross, his crucifixion of ill health over the past decade, for an everlasting crown. He, as all of us here, who was baptized in Christ, has been baptized in Christ's death only to be risen with Him, as we heard in the first reading from St. Paul to the Romans. For he endeavored to live with Christ, no longer a slave to sin, even dead to sin, in order to live with Christ.

This occasion may very well be a sad and sorrowful one--one of emptiness. Yet, Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, wants us to look upon it differently:

"We would have you be clear about those who sleep in death, brothers, otherwise you might yield to grief, like those who have no hope.

For, if we believe that Jesus died and rose, God will bring forth with him from the dead those also who have fallen asleep, believing in him.

Thenceforth, we shall be with the Lord unceasingly. Console one another with this message."

At this period in the Church's year, the octave of the Assumption of Mary, our Mother, it is so easy to "console ourselves" with these words of St. Paul: that God will raise from the dead those who also have fallen asleep believing in him. Mary, flesh of our flesh, ... woman, ... the serving, caring, educating partner in family, in life, ... is in eternal happiness, body and soul. Abdon, serving others, caring, educating God's children, Mary's son by adoption, ... Abdon who believed in Mary's real Son, will be raised by Christ to glory. We, all of us, if we believe in Him, will also "rise with him."

I believe it is appropriate to tell you something about John Christenson, our Brother Abdon. Death has often been a part of his life, for his parents died before he reached his teens and he was raised by a maiden aunt who has since passed away. His assignment immediately before beginning his long stay at St. Michael's was to New Iberia to replace a young Brother of 22 who had drowned in a boating accident...but, I am ahead of this short history.

Upon completing his novitiate in Lafayette, Louisiana, John Christenson, Brother Abdon, was assigned to a service position, working the garden and in maintenance at Lafayette, and later on at Las Vegas. Only after about five years of this was he encouraged to secure his bachelor's degree and teaching certification and so he joined a group of young Brothers in the Scholasticate at Las Vegas, all averaging at least six years younger than himself. I met him while he was working in Las Vegas, studied with him in college, and lived with him in Monterrey. His first assignment was to St. Michael's and then to Monterrey, Mexico for a period of five years; then back to St. Michael's after the half-year in New Iberia, Louisiana. He remained here until this past Wednesday, with the exception of two years at Cathedral High School in El Paso where he was principal his final year. He was not comfortable in this position and personally asked to be replaced, as he felt his best work could be done in the classroom in more closer contact with the young. In the course of his long years in Santa Fe, and in his short stay in Monterrey, he fell in love with Spanish and New Mexico and the evidence of both remains in his unpublished seven-volume work researching the vocabulary of New Mexico, its Spanish, Indian, and other origins.

But, his real love was always the classroom.

Many of you, his students and former students, all the way back to 1944, have your own recollections of Brother Abdon. Allow me to share a few of mine. I knew him as a very enthusiastic teacher, one who spent himself without counting the cost in helping his students. I knew him as a fierce competitor in all, a Brother who promoted love for the school, one who sponsored and sustained school activities, even, especially, athletics. He was a demanding teacher; I am sure you will all agree, especially those who, in youthful foolishness, gave him some trouble. But, I do not believe you can deny that he was seeking your good, so do not feel badly about it today. Even, you may have distracted him from the others so he could not be as demanding of them while he had to try to deal with you. And, what some of you may not know, he gave of his vacation money and monthly allowance (since the mid-sixties the Brothers have had such an allowance) he gave most of this to providing scholarships for many of his students, a real sacrifice of a personal nature for he seldom spent his money on himself.

And, Brothers, again you will have your own remembrances of Brother Abdon. I would like to recall to you his total dedication, his manner of living with us, so humble and self-effacing, his ready hand to support us in whatever work we all had to do. During the last decade or decade and a half, he had quite serious physical sufferings, much of which he never revealed for he often pushed himself to do his duty, and, over and above this, he suffered quite a bit, as so many of us in our mid-forties through mid-sixties, from the changes in Church and religious living brought on by a new approach to our life and to liturgy and living the faith. But, above all, he was a man of prayer, a man of simple faith--the faith of our Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle. He nourished and demonstrated this faith by a constant, filial, devotion to our Blessed Mother. Many were the times that I found him personally reciting the rosary, whether in chapel on his own, or, as I caught him several times last month, walking around the grounds at Christian Brothers School in New Orleans, telling his beads.

Brother Abdon, as we are here with you in chapel, in this Cathedral, for a last time, as we join with you in uniting the sacrifice of your life, the sum of your life in your death, with the sacrifice of Our Lord and Savior, let me tell you, from all your Brothers, THANKS for joining with us, for joining with your Brothers like Ruth with Naomi, for "going wherever we went", for "living with us", for "making our people--Brothers, students, parents--your people", for "serving with us, for a lifetime, our God and yours." THANKS for the example you have left us to reflect upon--of school duties as very important, of self-sacrifice not counting the cost, and, above all, of prayer and unsophisticated FAITH.

We are privileged, all of us here in the presence of your God and ours, all of us people of God--Brothers, students, friends--we are privileged that you lived with us. We are happy that your last months were so much easier, so much less painful, so happier for you. We will miss you, as we do miss you now, and our prayers and presence here wish you God speed as we now realize that Jesus Christ has finally said to you "Come, blessed of my Father..." for you knew you were serving Him when you were giving yourself to others.

Brother Abdon, from all your Brothers, for a last time we say to you "Live, Jesus, in our hearts!...Live Jesus with you, now, and ... Forever!

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